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Silent Order: The temporal turn in critical International Relations

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Abstract

Recently, more and more International Relations (IR) scholars have begun to recognize time explicitly as a political phenomenon and an important element of IR theorizing. Spanning different approaches and substantive concerns, their efforts suggest that IR is taking a ‘temporal turn’. This is most evident in the field’s critical wing, which has expanded our perspective on time and challenged temporalities associated with sovereign politics and mainstream theories. However, critical treatments of time also manifest four discursive habits – two targets of criticism and two alternatives – that reproduce hidden tensions and contradictions detrimental to the temporal turn. First, scholars incoherently denounce timeless visions of politics. Second, attacks on linear time obscure a variety of hegemonic temporalities and reproduce assumptions critics wish to challenge. Third, advocates of heterotemporality amass woolly alternatives, foreclosing analysis and dialogue. Finally, times of rupture recapitulate a liberal-idealism that depoliticizes temporal enquiry just when it could be pushing the politics of time further. These habits hamstring conceptual development and critical IR’s ability to contribute distinctive perspectives to a field growing increasingly interested in time. To redress this, the paper identifies and sharpens critical IR’s temporal tensions, shows how they encourage particular visions of time and politics, and suggests initial steps toward maximizing the critical potential of time.

Introduction

International Relations (IR) has always been concerned with temporal phenomena. Nuclear end times and enduring peace; modernization and long cycles; longitudinal statistics and the uses of history; the interwar, postcolonialism, and postpositivism; and the quest for accurate predictions all involve time. Recently, more scholars have begun to explicitly acknowledge this, moving time to the forefront of thinking about global politics. Thanks to seminal provocations by James der Derian¹ and R.B.J. Walker,² poststructural interventions by Jenny Edkins³ and Kimberly Hutchings,⁴ the rise of historical institutionalism⁵ and Bayesian

¹ James der Derian, ‘The (S)Pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance, and Speed,’ *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 295–310.

² R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *After the Globe, Before the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

³ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

statistics,⁶ and a number of more recent works,⁷ IR now engages time as a theoretical tool and political phenomenon in its own right. Complemented by a growing number of time-oriented panels at academic gatherings and agenda-setting efforts like this special issue, these developments suggest that IR is indeed entering a ‘temporal turn.’⁸

Institutionalist and statistical developments notwithstanding, this turn’s primary vector emanates from critical IR, which has paid the earliest and most sustained attention to time. For reasons of quantity and quality, it is impossible to do justice to this ever-expanding literature,⁹ which tackles political economy,¹⁰ security,¹¹ identity and Self/Other dynamics,¹² citizenship,¹³ cities and cinema,¹⁴ continental philosophy,¹⁵ and methodology,¹⁶ among others. What binds these works together is that they find in time a natural ally against sovereign politics and mainstream theorizing. That is, *critical IR scholars turn to time as a*

⁴ Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

⁵ See Orfeo Fioretos, ‘Historical Institutionalism in International Relations,’ *International Organization* 65, no. 02 (2011): 367–399, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818311000002>.

⁶ See Christopher McIntosh, ‘Theory across Time: The Privileging of Time-Less Theory in International Relations,’ *International Theory* 7, no. 3 (2015): 466–68.

⁷ In addition to the works discussed below, see David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

⁸ Felix Berenskoetter, ‘Reclaiming the Vision Thing: Constructivists as Students of the Future,’ *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 664.

⁹ For overviews, see Hutchings, *Time*; Tim Stevens, *Cyber Security and the Politics of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36–41; see also Andrew R. Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics,’ *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2018): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx090>.

¹⁰ David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, *Savage Economics: Wealth, Poverty and the Temporal Walls of Capitalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

¹¹ Stevens, *Cyber Security*; Liam P.D. Stockdale, ‘Imagined Futures and Exceptional Presents: A Conceptual Critique of “Pre-Emptive Security”,’ *Global Change, Peace & Security* 25, no. 2 (2013): 141–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2013.774342>; Andrew R. Hom, ‘Angst Springs Eternal: Dangerous Times and the Dangers of Timing the “Arab Spring,”’ *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 2 (2016): 165–83.

¹² Ty Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity in World Politics,’ *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 671–81; Andrew R. Hom and Ty Solomon, ‘Timing, Identity, and Emotion in International Relations,’ in *Time, Temporality, and Global Politics*, ed. Andrew R. Hom et al. (Bristol, UK: e-International Relations, 2016), 20–37.

¹³ Michael J. Shapiro, ‘National Times and Other Times: Re-Thinking Citizenship,’ *Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 79–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/095023800334995>; ‘Time, Disjuncture, and Democratic Citizenship,’ in *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political*, ed. Aryeh Botwinick and William E. Connolly (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Angharad Closs Stephens, ‘“Seven Million Londoners, One London”: National and Urban Ideas of Community in the Aftermath of the 7 July 2005 Bombings in London,’ *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 32, no. 2 (2007): 155–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540703200201>; ‘Citizenship without Community: Time, Design and the City,’ *Citizenship Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010): 31–46.

¹⁴ Michael J. Shapiro, *The Time of the City* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); *Politics and Time* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2016).

¹⁵ Hutchings, *Time*; Tom Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁶ McIntosh, ‘Theory’; Hutchings, *Time*, 81–105; Andrew R. Hom, ‘Reckoning Ruin: International Relations and the Problem of Time’ (Edinburgh, n.d.).

means of destabilizing hegemonic foundations—the international system, the logics of modernity, rationalist social science, to name a few.¹⁷ On this view, exploring time is an important way of ‘being critical,’¹⁸ it is useful for ‘shattering [the] systems of judgment’ on which conventional politics depends.¹⁹

As the many works already referenced indicate, critical IR scholars have been very successful putting time to work. But for all their individual merits and collective dynamism, critical IR treatments of time also manifest four discursive habits or ‘rhetorical commonplaces’ worth scrutinizing.²⁰ The first two are prominent targets of criticism, the latter two prevalent alternatives. While each habit includes innovative research on time, this paper argues that each also reproduces hidden problems. First, scholars challenge ‘timeless’ visions of politics without a coherent notion of the meaning or stakes of the term. Second, their denunciations of ‘linear time’ reify, totalize, and obscure a wide variety of powerful temporalities. Both of these habits unintentionally reproduce dominant assumptions about time. Third, the ways that exponents of ‘heterotemporality’ amass woolly temporal alternatives threatens to render critical IR a closed shop. Finally, theorists embrace temporalities of ‘rupture’ to challenge hegemonic logics but end up recapitulating a liberal-idealism that depoliticizes analysis just when it could be pushing the politics of time further.

This situation leaves critical IR’s temporal turn vulnerable to three charges. First, it supports Augustine’s observation that we easily grasp time until asked to explicate it.²¹ Second, it recalls a general criticism of social theory, which because ‘its referents are so diverse ... often obscures rather than creates understanding’ and thus ‘threatens to become

¹⁷ Neither the ‘critical project’ nor ‘IR’ are discretely bounded. Here ‘critical IR’ refers to postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, and broadly postpositivist thinking about global politics. This follows several of my key interlocutors, who self-identify as ‘critical’ scholars self-consciously writing *about* or *against* the academic field of ‘International Relations’ e.g. McIntosh, ‘Theory’; Walker, *Inside/Outside*; Jenny Edkins, ‘Novel Writing in International Relations: Openings for a Creative Practice,’ *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 4 (2013): 281–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010613491304>; Tom Lundborg, ‘The Limits of Historical Sociology: Temporal Borders and the Reproduction of the “Modern” Political Present,’ *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2016): 99–121, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115575399>.

¹⁸ Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo, ‘Being Critical and Imaginative in International Relations,’ in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, ed. Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 2–3; Tom Lundborg, ‘Time,’ in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, ed. Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 117; cf. Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything,’ 71.

¹⁹ Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, preface.

²⁰ John Shotter, *Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Language* (London: Sage, 1994).

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2011) bk.11:xiv:17.

meaningless.’²² Third, it evokes the auteur’s claim that the most important consideration for a term of reference is *not* whether anyone ‘knows what it means’ but whether ‘it’s provocative, it gets the people going.’²³ By shared intuitions, loose language, or rhetorical provocation, these issues dull the edge of critical work on time. To begin re-sharpening it, the main sections below unpack the meanings housed in our four temporal habits and examine what work they do in the critical project.²⁴ More specifically, I scrutinize how each habit names and organises phenomenological features by placing them within a discursive structure or language game that produces specific meanings and particular visions of politics.²⁵ The sections are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They feature particularly well-developed instances that help clarify the contours and consequences of critical IR’s discourse of time.

While inspired by and self-identifying with critical IR, I am concerned that its habituated tensions threaten the temporal turn with centrifugal disarray by closing down meaningful dialogue and isolating researches to the detriment of intellectual coherence and sustained engagement – both with time as a fundamental element of social life and with the wider IR audience that stands to benefit from critical knowledge of time.²⁶ These habits also contravene important critical commitments. My aim therefore is not to repudiate critical IR’s temporal turn or any of its constituents but rather to boost its momentum by ‘radical critique’, which involves ‘identifying and sharpening its symptomatic tensions and contradictions’²⁷ as a first step toward resolving them or making them more productive.

Timelessness

For many years, time functioned in IR as an intuitive backdrop for political processes or a variable readily operationalized by scholars inclined to search for enduring causal factors or to propound static, cyclical, and determinate accounts of international politics. So although the field depended on time, it remained vulnerable to charges that it could not deal with time

²² Robert King Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Simon and Schuster, 1968), 39.

²³ Josh Gordon and Will Speck, *Blades of Glory* (Paramount Pictures, 2007).

²⁴ These discussions draw inspiration from the ‘basic Socratic’ question, ‘What do you mean when you say _____?’; see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking: Vols 1&2* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 185; and a seminal critique of critical security studies, see Jef Huysmans, ‘Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier,’ *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 226–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066198004002004>.

²⁵ Felix Berenskoetter, ‘Approaches to Concept Analysis,’ *Millennium* 45, no. 2 (2017): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829816651934>; also Cecelia Lynch, *Interpreting International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 15.

²⁶ See Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything,’ 71.

²⁷ Patchen Markell, ‘Books in Review: Philosophy and Real Politics by Raymond Geuss,’ *Political Theory* 38, no. 1 (2010): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591709348870>.

because its theories did not allow for historical variation and further encouraged a view of the future as knowable and controllable.²⁸ These charges had substantive merit in many cases but were unhelpfully subsumed under a roomy and murky discourse of ‘timelessness.’ Among numerous referents, timelessness signifies axiomatic logic, generalizability, and scientism in general;²⁹ transhistorical continuity and the absence of historical context;³⁰ cycles or the ‘regular beat’ of a recurring series;³¹ and the veneration of contemporary agendas by reference to long-dead thinkers.³²

These references make intuitive sense but do not withstand closer scrutiny. Universal, generalizable, and transhistorical qualities, much like venerable traditions, indicate something that holds in all or most times. Far from timeless, they are more accurately *always timely*, or perhaps ‘timeful’, for they are pertinent to any situation. Diagnoses of continuity, cycles, rhythms, or a lack of context depend upon *some* temporal passage against which the pattern or absence of variation manifests as such. Here we might recall a classical *reductio ad absurdum* argument against timelessness: if ‘*the time* is the same, there is after all no recurrence.’³³ Finally, only by presuming some threshold of sufficiently temporal content (whatever that might mean) or that time equates with pure difference can these examples of ‘timelessness’ evoke an absence of temporality.

In critical work and beyond, conflating intrinsically temporal phenomena with timelessness produces strange formulations, such as a ‘timeless world in which concepts travel easily *back and forth* through the *years*’,³⁴ or the timeless ‘monotony’ of ‘reproductive’ power relations³⁵

²⁸ John M. Hobson, ‘What’s at Stake in ‘Bringing Historical Sociology Back into International Relations’? Transcending ‘Chronofetishism’ and ‘Tempocentrism’ in International Relations,’ in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, ed. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–41.

²⁹ Ibid., 10–12.

³⁰ Ibid., 30; Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 190; Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 102; McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 477; Andrew R. Hom and Brent J. Steele, ‘Open Horizons: The Temporal Visions of Reflexive Realism,’ *International Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2010): 280.

³¹ Hobson, ‘What’s at Stake,’ 30.

³² See Barry Buzan, ‘The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?’, in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47–65.

³³ Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 184 *emph. added*.

³⁴ Cameron G. Thies, ‘A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations,’ *International Studies Perspectives* 3, no. 4 (2002): 364, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.t01-1-00099> *emph. added*.

³⁵ Stanley H. Hoffmann, ‘International Relations: The Long Road to Theory,’ *World Politics* 11, no. 3 (1959): 350.

or “‘what *is* now is the same as what *was*, which in turn is the same as what *will be*.’”³⁶ Again, these descriptions appear ‘timeless’ only against some background temporal passage.³⁷ Indeed, in most cases, ‘timelessness’ mobilizes *relative* rather than *absolute* sameness for rhetorical effect rather than analytical development. Only rarely do IR scholars use ‘timelessness’ coherently to mark the absence of any change or passing *at all*.³⁸ All other invocations are temporally dubious because ‘even the most static and repetitive accounts of how international politics works’ assume and reproduce ‘some temporal patterning.’³⁹

The uses of ‘timelessness’

References to ‘timelessness’ clearly offer a trope for grasping a range of phenomena with different connotations for different people. Moreover, while almost entirely unacknowledged, most invocations of ‘timelessness’ indicate a measure of insulation from the *problem of time* – or time’s supposedly natural tendency to bring change, dissolution, and death.⁴⁰ For instance, consider transhistoricality and generality. As Chris McIntosh notes, a hypothesis or rule is ‘time-less’ if it applies ‘across time’, if particularity, difference, and uniqueness do not affect its validity.⁴¹ Put differently, timeless claims are context-invariant in a way that renders them free from the presumably differentiating effects of time’s passage.⁴² This is perhaps the most common meaning of ‘timelessness’, and McIntosh elaborates it further than anyone else. But this meaning depends upon an implicit problematisation of time in that it assumes contextual variation goes naturally with time and that these adversely impact hypotheses and rules – that while humans establish connections, time dissolves them. Indeed, only if ‘timeless’ means being ‘safe from the *vagaries* of time’ – chaos and decay – and thus ‘valid *regardless* of time’⁴³ can this term indicate something that is both *outside of time* and applicable *in every time*, as most IR invocations do.

³⁶ McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 477.

³⁷ Cycles may also produce novel changes, see Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 59.

³⁸ e.g. Martin Griffiths, *Realism, Idealism, and International Politics*, Reprint (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 42–43.

³⁹ Hutchings, *Time*, 93, 97; also McIntosh, ‘Theory.’

⁴⁰ Hom, ‘Angst Springs Eternal,’ 170–73; ‘Reckoning Ruin,’ Introduction.

⁴¹ McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 471; see also Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 102.

⁴² McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 474. Thus, temporality makes ‘context *more contextual*’; Ibid., 489.

⁴³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 48, 105, 3 *emph. added*. McIntosh qualifies ‘time-less’ as follows: ‘It is not my contention that context does not matter at all, rather that it only matters in an appreciable historical sense *from which time has no real discernable effect on its own*’; Christopher McIntosh, ‘Theorizing the Interim: IR as Study of the Present’ (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, unpublished book manuscript), 65; see also McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 468n2.

Although references to ‘timelessness’ raise few eyebrows in critical IR, its range, incoherence, and silent presumptions suggests that upon encountering such utterances we should ask for clarification about its constituent features and, further, scrutinize what sort of work it does in the discourse in question. The point here is *not* to arrive at a single definition, but rather that scholars would benefit from knowing whether they are even speaking of the same thing in the same way. As it stands, with only the rare exception,⁴⁴ ‘timeless’ in IR serves as a fuzzy charge easily lobbed at static theories, claims about enduring value, or aspirations to scientific status, but not a carefully worked out conceptual tool. Moreover, IR’s discourse of ‘timelessness’ operates at a very high level of abstraction dependent on shared assumptions about *which* processes, events, and actors matter enough for their patternings to stand out against the wider passage of time and be dubbed timeless.

There are no comprehensively frozen ‘snapshot’ accounts of international politics, as a coherent use of ‘timeless’ would entail. Even the archetypal example of ‘timeless’ neorealism is bound up with temporality. Kenneth Waltz lamented ‘classical thinking’ as too ‘static’ to grapple with the end of the Cold War and its implications ‘in the present and ... in the future.’⁴⁵ He developed structural theory expressly ‘to peer into the future ... among the unknowns that abound.’⁴⁶ It would stretch the term past the breaking point to tabulate these efforts as matters of ‘timelessness.’⁴⁷ Moreover, dispensing with this term would allow critics to sharpen their charges against such approaches by elaborating and *differentiating* the problems with transhistorical knowledge claims, recurrent accounts, and other varietals of ‘timelessness.’ It would also destabilize laudatory proposals to develop ‘timeless’ theory as the key to scientific progress. Instead of proclaiming or profaning ‘timelessness’, the stronger move for critical scholars is to deny timelessness, full stop, and thereby move core theoretical, epistemological, and methodological debates onto a thoroughly temporal terrain, one currently dominated by critical work.

⁴⁴ Hutchings, *Time*, 97; McIntosh, ‘Theory.’

⁴⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘The Emerging Structure of International Politics,’ *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 55–56, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539097>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁷ ‘Timelessness’ thus works as a ‘slogan’ or “‘fundamental code of culture’” in that it characterizes present ‘experiential content’ but also looks backwards and forwards, Berenskoetter, ‘Approaches,’ 157.

Linear time

Even more than timelessness, ‘linear time’ plays the *bête noire* in critical IR.⁴⁸ This appellation subsumes a huge variety of temporal phenomena associated with hegemonic logics, including but not limited to state sovereignty,⁴⁹ national citizenship,⁵⁰ security,⁵¹ Enlightenment capitalism and colonialism,⁵² history,⁵³ patriarchy,⁵⁴ western calendars and clocks,⁵⁵ neopositivism,⁵⁶ progress and rationality,⁵⁷ and narrative.⁵⁸ How precisely these issues link to or instantiate ‘linear time’ – and how this supports hegemony – typically remains unsaid. Moreover, the rare qualifications of ‘linear time’ add little in the way of clarity. Linear time is ‘bounded’, ‘rational’, and ‘homogeneous.’⁵⁹ It depends on heroic narratives of specific deeds but is also a smooth ‘continuum’ moving us ‘steadily from moment to moment’ or, relatedly, an ‘empty’ container for events.⁶⁰ These visions of linear time contrast discontinuity.⁶¹ Yet elsewhere linear time associates with discontinuity, with discrete parcels of past, present, and future sometimes normatively valued as progress.⁶² This distinguishes linear time from continuous, pre-modern, or indigenous temporalities, which are ‘non-linear’ because they co-mingle the past and future in each present and thus admit no temporal borders.⁶³ Occasionally, ‘linear’ indicates both continuity *and*

⁴⁸ See Samuel A. Chambers, ‘Untimely Politics Avant La Lettre: The Temporality of Social Formations,’ *Time & Society* 20, no. 2 (2011): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X11399174>.

⁴⁹ Walker, *Inside/Outside*; Shapiro, ‘National Times’; Edkins, *Trauma*, 15–16; Lundborg, *Politics*, 78, 86; on linear state time, cf. Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 285; and Hidemi Suganami, ‘Narrative Explanation and International Relations: Back to Basics,’ *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 352.

⁵⁰ Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 89; Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34.

⁵¹ Edkins, *Trauma*, 19; Lundborg, *Politics*, 46–57; Stockdale, ‘Imagined Futures,’ 154.

⁵² Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 191; Edkins, *Trauma*, 31–32.

⁵³ Lundborg, *Politics*; ‘Limits’; but cf. ‘true Historical events’ in Antoine Bousquet, ‘Time Zero: Hiroshima, September 11 and Apocalyptic Revelations in Historical Consciousness,’ *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34, no. 3 (2006): 740.

⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, Alice Jardine, and Harry Blake, ‘Women’s Time,’ *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 13–35.

⁵⁵ Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 82; Andrew R. Hom, ‘Hegemonic Metronome: The Ascendancy of Western Standard Time,’ *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 4 (2010): 1164.

⁵⁶ Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 83.

⁵⁷ Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34, 37.

⁵⁸ Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity,’ 673; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing.’

⁵⁹ Edkins, *Trauma*, 229.

⁶⁰ Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 85; cf. Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 285 and 286; Edkins, *Trauma*, 95, xiv–xv, 229; Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34. The linear-homogeneous link is consistent with *some* contrasts between linear time and discontinuity, which is ‘ephemeral’, ‘fleeting’, and ‘disjunctive’; *Ibid.*, 32; Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 84; but does not explicate how linearity also comports with discontinuity, as in Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 72–73.

⁶¹ Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 32; Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 84.

⁶² Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*; Hom and Steele, ‘Open Horizons,’ 276–78. For an analogous reading of linear time establishing both collective identity and atomized individuals, see Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 287.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; Lundborg, *Politics*, 110. This is distinguished without differentiation from the smooth, ‘linear’ continuum just mentioned.

discontinuity, as when heroic national narratives produce discrete succession and time as ‘continuous and linear.’⁶⁴

Critical scholars also contrast linear time with cyclical or circular temporalities.⁶⁵ By this way of thinking, cyclicity problematizes the arrow-like trajectory of linear time’s forward thrust, a movement which complements the logics of nationalism, patriarchy, and causation.⁶⁶ These alternatives to linearity as such are not especially coherent. In cyclical time the past “‘directly effects the present and the future’”.⁶⁷ This is very much a causal statement.⁶⁸ Moreover, rendered as simplistic binaries, linear/cyclical distinctions are spurious: a *cycle* refers to an undulating line or sine wave,⁶⁹ and the further in we zoom, the straighter it appears. Finally, like invocations of ‘timelessness’ a basic sense of linearity *facilitates* rather than *precludes* cyclical imputations, providing the serial baseline passage against which recurrence resolves as such.

Other critical alternatives to linear time also depend on linearity inasmuch as they propound a lineal-spatial metaphor and/or assume some sense of past, present, and future (or before and after). For example, duration, chronotopicity, and retroactive and anticipatory meaning-making imply, respectively: the serial connectability of experiential moments, a spatialized and gridded shape, a clear sense of backward and forward.⁷⁰ Or consider time as ‘becoming’, which refutes linearity because it moves ‘in different directions at the same time, into the past and into the future.’⁷¹ Nothing about ‘linear’ *per se* opposes this movement or the sense of

⁶⁴ Edkins, *Trauma*, 34.

⁶⁵ e.g. *ibid.*, 1–19; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 288.

⁶⁶ Edkins, *Trauma*; Stephens, “‘Seven Million’,” 169; Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 114. Thus dissidence involves ‘encircling’ political traumas to resist gentrifying heroic narratives, although cf. Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything,’ 77.

⁶⁷ Stephens, “‘Seven Million’,” 169 *emph. added*; also Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 190; cf. Anne McClintock, ‘The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Post-Colonialism,”’ *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 85, 91.

⁶⁸ On poststructural causality, see Milja Kurki and Hidemi Suganami, ‘Towards the Politics of Causal Explanation: A Reply to the Critics of Causal Inquiries,’ *International Theory* 4, no. 03 (2012): 400–429, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971912000127>.

⁶⁹ If time itself were cyclical or circular, we would repeat experiences *exactly* as before, which would preclude apprehending this very phenomenon; Sorabji, *Time*, 184–85.

⁷⁰ Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity,’ 673 contrasts this with the ‘linearity’ of a sentence, implying unidirectionality, segmentation, and straightness. But like narratives, sentences compose an interpretive *gestalt* – they makes sense *as a whole* and require us to double back so that chronological endpoints also provide hermeneutic conclusions; see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume I*, ed. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 41.

⁷¹ Lundborg, *Politics*, 3; ‘Time,’ 263.

continual development evoked by ‘becoming.’ As before, becoming only resolves as such against a basic linear comparator.

Non-linear proposals based on time-as-becoming are even more explicitly linear. *Aion* describes the ‘pure’ and ‘empty form’ of a ‘straight line’,⁷² which vitiates ontologies of presence by stretching out ‘limitless in either direction.’⁷³ It is the movement by which ‘the line’ frees itself from the punctual present so as to ‘[c]onstantly flee ... in different directions.’⁷⁴ These characterizations depend on a *classical* notion of linearity: ‘a line that is single, straight and infinite in both directions.’⁷⁵ Yet *aion*’s champions pit these very qualities directly against the state’s linear time, in particular its ‘linear timelines and distinctions between before and after.’⁷⁶ Now it may be that they mean *aion* to challenge a specifically *discontinuous* and *unitary* form of linearity, but as the summary above showed, these qualities do not exhaust the possible meanings of linearity. Similarly, it is difficult to understand how the ‘pure event’ associated with *aion* refuses distinctions between before and after but depends on notions of the past and future. Something more is going on with the *aionic* challenge to state and historical time, but most of the grappling remains hidden by a discourse based on a number of silent, shared assumptions about just what ‘linear’ encompasses.

Similar problems stalk critical scholars’ interest in the non-linear ‘countertemporality’ of alternative knowledge genres.⁷⁷ For instance, where linear state narratives close down political possibility, films are ‘powerful [because they do] not try to bring [experiences] together in order to form a unity.’⁷⁸ Now alternative cinematic accounts of events may indeed challenge hegemonic interpretations, but to gloss them as ‘non-linear’ because they possess no ‘clear temporal order that can be used ... to determine the sequence of images and sounds in accordance with a homogeneous movement or a narrative that takes us from the past to the present’ forgets the linearity of the artistic medium itself and the sovereign practices involved

⁷² Lundborg, *Politics*, 17.

⁷³ Deleuze, quoted in Hutchings, *Time*, 69.

⁷⁴ Lundborg, *Politics*, 12; Hutchings, *Time*, 69–70.

⁷⁵ Proclus, quoted in Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (London: Routledge, 1937), 103. Intriguingly, others interpret Deleuzian time as cut from the same ‘passive’ cloth as the ‘physical time’ of the straight line; Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008), 207.

⁷⁶ Lundborg, *Politics*, 21, also 3, 12, 29.

⁷⁷ Shapiro, ‘Time, Disjuncture,’ 241; Lundborg, *Politics*; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing.’

⁷⁸ Lundborg, *Politics*, 89.

in the ‘series of cutting and sequencing’ that the auteur uses to ‘disrupt the very notion of a whole.’⁷⁹ It makes no sense to claim that cinema’s ‘time-image’ produces “images without subordinating them to coherent movements and linear timelines”⁸⁰ unless we ignore the series of singular images that compose a film and have in mind a specific and particular understanding of linearity. Just as hegemonic narratives construct coherent unity, films purposefully construct a non-coherent storyline by manipulating an intrinsically linear series. It is this structural quality that led earlier time scholars to attack determinism by charging that it ‘denied time and freedom by rolling up the future in the present *the way the end of a film is already determined at the start of the reel.*’⁸¹ Such tensions would not be so conspicuous if critical scholars did not persist in positioning them against a murky, libertine notion of ‘linear time.’⁸²

The uses of ‘linear time’, or which line(s)?

It is not always clear what ‘linear’ adds to reflections on dominant and dissident politics. Occasionally, it signifies discrete temporal parcels of the past, present, and future,⁸³ asymmetry or uni-directionality,⁸⁴ or the upward progress of human history.⁸⁵ Alternatively, it marks an objectivist approach to history as dead, buried, and knowable.⁸⁶ This diversity is easily explained by the capaciousness of a metaphorical referent as ambiguous as ‘linear.’ As feminist scholars note, ‘linear’ can indicate ‘a finite segment, an infinite line, an indefinite line, a braid or multistranded line’;⁸⁷ as well as diverse temporal perspectives – ‘time as project, teleology, ... prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival’; or a ‘linear, cursive history.’⁸⁸ It could also be easily elaborated: *unilinear*, *rectilinear*, *curvilinear*, *multilinear*, etc. Any of these qualifications would improve clarity and enable more systematic engagement by beginning to differentiate amongst the many linear times of politics.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 90–92 *emph. added*; see Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 19.

⁸⁰ Lundborg, *Politics*, 91; Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 17.

⁸¹ Bergson, quoted in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 101 *emph. added*.

⁸² For discussions of other genres that depend on this same rhetorical flourish, see Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 58, 73; also Shapiro, ‘Time, Disjuncture,’ 236; Lundborg, *Politics*; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing.’

⁸³ e.g. Lundborg, *Politics*, 21.

⁸⁴ Hom and Steele, ‘Open Horizons,’ 276; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 287; Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 73; cf. Barbara Adam, *Time* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 32.

⁸⁵ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*; Hom and Steele, ‘Open Horizons.’

⁸⁶ Stephens, “Seven Million,” 169.

⁸⁷ Carol J. Greenhouse, *A Moment’s Notice: Time Politics Across Cultures* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 20.

⁸⁸ Kristeva, Jardine, and Blake, ‘Women’s Time,’ 16–17, 24.

Of the many meanings of linearity, one of the most common is a unitary time that excludes many subject positions and possibilities. If this seems unclear, it is because ‘the problem is not linear time *as such*’ but rather its presumptive link to ‘a view of the world as a *totality*’,⁸⁹ its ‘imaginary wholeness.’⁹⁰ This is why it makes sense to embrace ‘an *understanding of time as plural*.’⁹¹ However, such qualifications are exceedingly rare in critical IR, which more often than not proceeds by assumption. For example, take this well-cited quote from the novelist Carlos Fuentes on local peasant farmer wisdom: ‘there is more than one time in the world, ... there is another time existing alongside, above, underneath the linear time of the calendars of the West.’⁹² Absent important shared assumptions, linearity has little to do with this. The issue is *singularity* rather than *linearity*, a point ably demonstrated by the fact that Hutchings’ work on totalizing international political theories dispenses almost completely with ‘linear’ metaphors and instead works with the difference between ‘unitary’ political time and ‘heterotemporal’ alternatives (more on this below).

Beyond conflation with unity, another set of assumptions underpins critical discussions of ‘linear time.’ Many of the non/linear interpretations catalogued so far make sense only if we assume that ‘linear’ entails not just basic seriality but something more: straightness (*rectilinearity*) underpins cyclical alternatives’ non-linearity;⁹³ straightness with direction (*rectilinear asymmetry*) the non-linearity of retroaction or doubling back;⁹⁴ and singularity, straightness, direction, and improvement (*unirectilinear progress*) the non-linearity of ambivalent temporalities.⁹⁵ What binds these diverse references to non/linearity together? A neopositivist understanding of linear time.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Angharad Closs Stephens, ‘Beyond Imaginative Geographies: Critique, Cooptation and Imagination in the Aftermath of the War on Terror,’ in *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn*, ed. Samson Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 56.

⁹⁰ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 288. However, arch-unilinear histories of developmental progress also stress *incompleteness*, locating contemporary others ‘behind’ the exemplary self, see Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*; Andrew R. Hom and Brent J. Steele, ‘Child’s Play: Temporal Discourse, Counterpower, and Environmental Politics,’ in *Time and Violence in IR: (De)Fatalizing the Present, Forging Radical Alternatives*, ed. Anna M. Agathangelou and Kyle Killian (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 189–204; Hom, ‘Angst Springs Eternal,’ 173–76.

⁹¹ Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34.

⁹² Shapiro, ‘Time, Disjuncture,’ 236; ‘National Times,’ 82–83; *Politics and Time*, 16; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 289.

⁹³ Edkins, *Trauma*.

⁹⁴ Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity,’ 674; see also Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 190.

⁹⁵ Lundborg, *Politics*, 109.

⁹⁶ e.g. Fioretos, ‘Historical Institutionalism,’ 379.

In statistical inference, ‘linear’ describes functions that compose additive and scalar transformations graphed by single, straight lines (e.g. $y = \alpha + \beta x + \varepsilon$).⁹⁷ It is a very specific, mathematically-founded, linearity associated almost exclusively with rigid, smooth surfaces and ‘homogeneous’ or flat relationships.⁹⁸ Other shapes, like a ‘plane with a changing slope’ or exponential, logarithmic, and otherwise curved graphs (e.g. sine and cosine functions) are non-linear.⁹⁹ This understanding of linearity also informs monocausal explanation, in which a principal input produces exclusive and proportionate changes in outcomes.¹⁰⁰ And it is what grants clocks and calendars their sense of reckoning time *per se* by the regular accumulation of discrete quantities. This especially strict, neopositivist standard of linearity helps dissident phenomena resolve as non-linear.¹⁰¹ Although most critical scholars partake of this wider symbolic order of ‘non/linear’, none reflect on its neopositivist and mathematical foundations, leaving the dominant interpretation of linearity as singular, straight, and flat unchallenged and even re-affirmed by alternatives that only work as ‘non-linear’ *within* that interpretive frame. In trying to destabilize the ‘West’s “successive, linear, and [neo]positivistic notion of time”’,¹⁰² critical IR actually reinforces it at the level of basic concepts, further obscuring the historical, contingent and relatively recent temporal achievements from which the state’s ‘linear time’ springs.¹⁰³

The ‘linear/non-linear’ binary constitutes something of an orthodoxy in critical IR but withers under closer scrutiny. This section offered a glimpse of the striking diversity amongst both ‘linear’ targets and ‘non-linear’ alternatives – enough that the distinction itself collapses under its own weight unless buttressed by additional, silent assumptions. In addition to relying on neopositivist meanings, a central irony here is that this critical orthodoxy relies on *generalizing* and *totalizing* moves – the conceptual frame of ‘linearity’ is so abstract and ambiguous that it accommodates *and* reduces a great temporal variety,¹⁰⁴ making it seem that the relationship between time and hegemonic politics is a simple affair. The stronger and more critically reflexive approach would be to pluralize our account of linearity, to embrace

⁹⁷ A polynomial function with a degree of two or more produces a ‘non-linear’, i.e. curved, graph.

⁹⁸ Will H. Moore and David A. Siegel, *A Mathematics Course for Political and Social Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 57.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51, 56.

¹⁰⁰ McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 485.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 112–13 reads the ‘multi-linear’ qualities of interacting societies as ‘non-linear.’

¹⁰² Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 83.

¹⁰³ Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything,’ 73–75.

¹⁰⁴ Berenskoetter, ‘Approaches,’ 154.

heterolinearity in explicit and systematic fashion. We need to systematically unpack and differentiate the *many* heroic histories, *teloi*, and other temporal relations bound up in hegemonic politics so as to systematically elaborate linear *times* and their alternatives instead of succumbing to the neopositivist line.

Heterotemporality

While many totalize linear time, critical IR scholars also support the move to develop a ‘heterotemporal’ perspective that broadens the theoretical and practical horizons of international politics. Hutchings makes this case most forcefully, highlighting the sovereign politics implicated in unitary visions of time and arguing instead that because political life is necessarily heterotemporal, any theory wishing to do more than prop up hegemony must leave room for multiple, co-existing, and diverse understandings of time – especially those of women, subaltern, and other traditionally marginalized groups.¹⁰⁵ Numerous critical scholars embrace variants of this position.¹⁰⁶

Arguments for heterotemporality are normatively compelling,¹⁰⁷ and bolstered theoretically by the vast array of times that scholars have discovered and mobilized to problematize clocks, calendars, and heroic state narratives.¹⁰⁸ As one observer notes: ‘Under the heading of a new thinking of time, we find a diverse set of names/concepts: duration, disruptive time, time as becoming, spectrality, time out of joint, untimeliness, hauntology.’¹⁰⁹ Today this list only scratches the surface of critical IR, which also includes the *chronos/kairos/aion* philosophical triad,¹¹⁰ ‘eventful’ temporalities,¹¹¹ temporal ‘decenteredness’,¹¹² and ‘open’ and ‘closed’ temporalities.¹¹³ Critical scholars have also stocked the empirical storehouse with alternatives like ‘trauma time’,¹¹⁴ overlapping “temporal traces” of citizenship,¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁵ Hutchings, *Time*, 162–64.

¹⁰⁶ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 7; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 289; Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 15–17; Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34; Ritu Vij, ‘Temporality, Civic Engagement, and Alterity Indo-Kei in Contemporary Japan,’ *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 37, no. 1 (2012): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0304375412441560>.

¹⁰⁷ Hutchings, *Time*, 154–77; Lundborg, *Politics*, 106–15.

¹⁰⁸ For an early example, see der Derian, ‘(S)Pace,’ 307.

¹⁰⁹ Chambers, ‘Untimely Politics,’ 198.

¹¹⁰ Hutchings, *Time*; Lundborg, *Politics*.

¹¹¹ McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 492–93; Lundborg, *Politics*, 4.

¹¹² Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity,’ 671.

¹¹³ Hom and Steele, ‘Open Horizons.’

¹¹⁴ Edkins, *Trauma*.

¹¹⁵ Stephens, ‘Citizenship,’ 34.

‘savage’ or indigenous time,¹¹⁶ and ‘private’ and ‘women’s’ time,¹¹⁷ among many others. These are intriguing additions. Yet they remain mostly isolated from each other because critical works primarily focus on discovery rather than synoptic analysis or cross-temporal dialogue.¹¹⁸

If such dialogue were prioritized, even stalwart efforts would require clarification. Consider two complementary critiques of temporal Othering (the location of contemporary difference ‘behind’ western civilization on a universal historical scale),¹¹⁹ which use ‘time travel’ quite differently. For Hutchings, the risk in theorizing world political time as unitary is that it positions the theorist as ‘a prophet and time-traveller’, occupying a privileged position between ‘determinism and god-like powers.’¹²⁰ This position cashes out differently depending on the theory in question¹²¹ but produces authority and control by doing conceptual and often practical violence to other peoples and their lived times. Time travel is for Hutchings a hegemonic theoretical practice.

On the other hand, Blaney and Inayatullah recommend ‘travels in time’ as a way to ‘reshape the past and future’ and then hold them up as ‘mirrors’ to a reified present.¹²² Their time travel is a deliberately anachronistic process that deploys forgotten, overlooked, or novel constructions to destabilize contemporary logics and thereby learn to live with our history and with each other more equitably. In Hutchings, time travel helps subordinate the subaltern;¹²³ in Blaney and Inayatullah, it helps liberate them by revealing ‘the “internal alterity” of thought.’¹²⁴ Time travel, then, is both a symptom of hegemony and its potential cure. At the very least, this calls for dialogue and elaboration—not so we settle on *the* meaning of time travel but to discover overlaps and tensions that might enrich each treatment and afford a more complex account of time traveling as a political resource and a modern conceptual device.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 186–90.

¹¹⁷ Kristeva, Jardine, and Blake, ‘Women’s Time’; Valerie Bryson, *Gender and the Politics of Time: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Debates* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything,’ 71. For two exceptional examples of synoptic analysis, see Hutchings, *Time*; Stevens, *Cyber Security*.

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¹²⁰ Hutchings, *Time*, 95, 155.

¹²¹ e.g. see *ibid.*, 98 discussion of Bueno de Mesquita and Mearsheimer.

¹²² Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 196.

¹²³ Hutchings, *Time*, 164.

¹²⁴ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 7.

¹²⁵ James Gleick, *Time Travel: A History* (London: 4th Estate, 2017).

Blaney and Inayatullah's proposal invites further scrutiny. They suggest we engage the 'savage times' of hunter-gather experience to shatter the 'mythic edifice of a universal history of human material and social progress' and thereby enable more ethical modes of social exchange.¹²⁶ Hunter-gatherers 'experience and participate in time in terms of continuity, not disjuncture. Because the past is not separated from the present or the future, human society cannot be imagined in terms of some unfolding or developmental logic. Rather, ritual action creates and recreates time and the cosmos as the present', and "all that exists [derives] from a single, unchanging, timeless source."¹²⁷ This encourages sharing over consumption, the responsible management of abundance rather than crisis and scarcity, and communal cohesion instead of material competition. Indeed, sharing in abundance grounds hunter-gatherers 'in the continuities of a timeless social space', which generates "spontaneous order" where modern development theory expects only disarray.¹²⁸

While intriguing, savage time underscores the tensions with time noted earlier. Blaney and Inayatullah pit it against linear time, but the 'timeless' quality they find here *depends* upon the 'linear' baseline temporality of capitalism – it is timeless because it is *not* accumulative or developmental. Their 'timelessness' further refers to a recollected past and communal future explicitly co-mingled with present experience. This only resonates as 'timeless' under one or both of two conditions. First, if we identify time with progressive disjuncture,¹²⁹ then we can meaningfully link the appellation 'timeless' to its opposite. Otherwise, a 'timeless time' of 'continuity' emerging from a 'timeless social space' of abundance begs elaboration to avoid begging belief, not least because continuity,¹³⁰ emergence, and exchange are intrinsically temporal processes and concepts.¹³¹ Second, if we presume the problem of time (i.e. its intrinsic link to dissolution, see p. 000), then a societal order or context (time) that has devised a way to stave off the 'erosion of time' and thus offer the perpetual renewal of spontaneous organization and coexistence might appear timeless.¹³² Absent these

¹²⁶ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 190.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 195, 191.

¹²⁹ It remains unclear why disjuncture and not continuity marks 'linear.'

¹³⁰ Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 195.

¹³¹ Conspicuously, Stockdale, 'Imagined Futures,' 154 refers to a nearly identical temporality as 'linear.'

¹³² Blaney and Inayatullah, *Savage Economics*, 190.

assumptions, it becomes hard to understand how *reconvening* experience via *repetition* and ritual mounts a ‘timeless’ challenge to modern, statist, ‘linear’ time.¹³³

Why heterotemporality matters in critical IR

It is a boon rather than a bane that scholars locate such temporal variety in global politics. The problem is that this temporal cornucopia marks the fuzzy end of the story rather than a promising beginning.¹³⁴ Many examples of time pluralism function as provocative metaphors, similes, or signifiers of larger phenomena, rather than carefully worked out concepts or connections. In this way, critical scholars champion heterotemporality but neglect time. This would be fine as far as it goes, except for two things. First, it would not go very far because proliferation is a poor substitute for engagement. Second, habitually evoking plural times without elaboration or dialogue presumes a *lot* of shared understandings between interlocutors. There is no guarantee we all possess the same hermeneutic toolkit. And even if we do grasp temporal meanings intuitively, this only encourages a situation where time utterances transmit information in a way that obscures their ‘wider order of meaning.’¹³⁵ Most of the conceptual action remains below the surface, a hallmark of an insider’s discourse or closed shop. This situation is problematic in a subfield committed to ‘multiple worlds’,¹³⁶ global dialogue, and to making the ‘familiar’ seem ‘strange.’¹³⁷

Even if we accept that time is a matter of interpretation all the way down, we can still unpack meanings and highlight ‘significant overlaps’ between various times.¹³⁸ Moreover, as a pragmatic matter, our argumentation should still strive to be ‘sufficiently transparent for others to form their own judgments.’¹³⁹ As with timelessness and linearity, the critical discourse of heterotemporality works by familiarity and common sense instead of clarity and elaboration. Having discovered a blooming multiplicity of times in political life, it only becomes more important to analyse them systematically.¹⁴⁰ Doing so would not only enrich our understanding of specific temporal constructs, it would afford a more synoptic (if never total) view of the temporal dynamics of global politics.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Arendt, *Life*, 185.

¹³⁵ Huysmans, ‘Security!’, 226; Hom, ‘Timing Is Everything’, 71.

¹³⁶ Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹³⁷ See Lynch, *Interpreting*, 15.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See Berenskoetter, ‘Approaches’, 151–52.

Rupture

Perhaps no temporality exemplifies the critical project more than that of ‘rupture’, or shocking and unprecedented moments of radical discontinuity. By unsettling the status quo and presenting possibilities for transformation, ruptures readily complement efforts to ‘disrupt’ hegemonic logics. Interest in ruptures also flows from the empirical observation that a politics of clean relations between unified states obscures more than it reveals about the ‘temporal junctures and disjunctures that every political collective encompasses’ in its illusion of wholeness and unity.¹⁴¹ To recover these, critical scholars take it as their task to explore alternative accounts and genres that ‘unsettle, disrupt, challenge; they refuse easy categorization and ask us to remain with uncertainty.’¹⁴² Doing so enables the theoretical discovery (or recovery) of “‘ambivalent temporalit[ies]” via concepts that ‘disturb the universalizing pretensions’ of our ‘modern political present’ and ‘resist the closural impulses’ of hegemonic knowledge.¹⁴³

For example, we might think politics through the ‘pure event’, which admits no ‘overarching structure’ or ‘temporal borders’ and thus ‘lacks presence, meaning and identity.’¹⁴⁴ These absences open up possibilities for escaping ‘violent practices of response’, ‘mundane forms of security’, and other well-worn ruts driving competition and conflict.¹⁴⁵ As Tom Lundborg explains, the pure event allows us to ‘take seriously moments of rupture’ because it

highlights the limits of any attempt to grasp or “comprehend” the event through, for example, long-term processes and largescale patterns. It points, moreover, to our inability to “anticipate” the future. ... It breaks with any and all explanatory / interpretive frameworks, renders structures (“ideational” as well as “material”) open and necessarily incomplete, and disrupts the “present” in which the autonomous subject of history and reason is supposed to stand.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 82.

¹⁴² Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 286.

¹⁴³ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 114; Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 82.

¹⁴⁴ Lundborg, *Politics*, 87, 114–15.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 115.

All of this augurs ‘a future that is radically open, radically unknown and always potentially disruptive.’¹⁴⁷ Here we might discover ‘the conditions under which *something new* is produced’ by exploring ‘alternative encounters with the event—encounters that do not submit to the standard lines and limits of history and instead *open up to something completely different*.’¹⁴⁸ More specifically, we might encounter ‘the radically other’ and conditions productive of ‘*another politics*’, one that embraces the ‘continuous renegotiation of the aggregation of difference’ rather than the suffocating determinations of unity associated with linear time.¹⁴⁹

Critical scholars maintain that thinking through rupture does *not* involve re-interpreting shocking experiences or re-directing political processes, which would only substitute one closure for another, limit how we think about time and becoming, and thus constrain the horizons of ‘what kind of change is allowed to take place’ or ‘what form of life should be maintained.’¹⁵⁰ *At most*, we might ask of ruptured time the same question put to works of art: ‘does it both make some sort of political sense *and* produce a shock to sense from the way it resists meaning? Does it make productive *political* use of the way concepts in language do not hold?’¹⁵¹ Does it inspire “‘a politics without denouement’”?¹⁵²

To support these inquiries, critical scholars develop ways of propping open the rupture to allow something genuinely novel to emerge organically. Lundborg proposes experimentation with Deleuzian ‘lines of flight’ that escape the present social field in part by shifting from ‘molar’ (calculable/structural) to ‘molecular’ (particular) ways of thinking politics.¹⁵³ For Edkins, this entails aesthetic “‘local and occasional’” explorations of how ‘a particular text disturbs a particular order’, which eschew any generalization or summary of lessons learned.¹⁵⁴ Shapiro’s ‘aesthetic practice’ similarly emphasizes ‘disagreement’ and sublime in order to ‘resurrect’ the event and ‘summon’ further political ‘disjunctures’ that remind us

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 117.

¹⁴⁸ Lundborg, *Politics*, 1, 87 *emph. added*.

¹⁴⁹ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 117; Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 289; Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 85; see also Walker, *After the Globe*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Lundborg, *Politics*, 109.

¹⁵¹ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 286.

¹⁵² Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 95.

¹⁵³ Lundborg, *Politics*, 93–105.

¹⁵⁴ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 292.

“‘you never know what you are actually [confronting]’”.¹⁵⁵ These methods promise to preserve the possibility of different ways of coexisting – they are *political* but not engaged in any particular politics.

There are good reasons to be sceptical about such claims. As other time scholars note, it is exceedingly difficult to invoke time and temporality without evoking political commitments. Hutchings finds temporal patterns with implicit politics lurking in *any* international political theory,¹⁵⁶ while Tim Stevens argues that ‘chronopolitics is embedded within *all* our notions of how society operates and how it might be characterized. This applies not only to the chronotypical imaginings of political elites *but to those who would resist them* and to our own analyses.’¹⁵⁷ These points link back to language games, in which any ‘*type of language*’ – even that of openness and contingency – ‘not only provides descriptors but also incorporates moral judgment.’¹⁵⁸ The discourse of rupture is a language game in its own right, which implicitly replaces extant systems of meaning with ‘a new type of “game”’ with ‘ethical commitments to expose and *disrupt*, at a minimum, or to change in favor of a vaguely defined “better” alternative, at a maximum, unequal relations of power.’¹⁵⁹ It is necessary, therefore, to ask ‘what sorts of politics IR scholars are involved in when they explore alternative possibilities’ through times of rupture.¹⁶⁰

While undeniably different from ‘linear’ or ‘timeless’ visions of politics, critical invocations of ‘rupture’, ‘disjuncture’, and ‘disruption’ share a basic functional similarity with dominant temporalities. All express the human capacity for transmitting meaning and establishing relationships.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, as self-consciously political interventions, rupturous temporalities at least imply a preferred way of cohabiting the world or gesture at a valuation somewhere between different and better.¹⁶² The substance of these political commitments

¹⁵⁵ Shapiro, *Politics and Time*, 120–21, 163–64; for a different take on aesthetics and the terror sublime, see Bousquet, ‘Time Zero,’ 745.

¹⁵⁶ Hutchings, *Time*.

¹⁵⁷ Stevens, *Cyber Security*, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Lynch, *Interpreting*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 41, 66.

¹⁶⁰ Mhurchú and Shindo, ‘Being Critical,’ 7.

¹⁶¹ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 285; see Norbert Elias, *An Essay on Time* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), 38.

¹⁶² Elias, *An Essay on Time*, 104; Neta C. Crawford, ‘Feminist Futures,’ ed. Jutta Weldes, *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics*, 2003, 198, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982087_9; also Berenskoetter, ‘Reclaiming,’ 655.

remains hidden in rupture discourse's disavowal of interpretation and re-direction. This situation engenders four temporal tensions.

First, while ruptured time may be important to think, it is exceedingly hard to live. Rupture links closely to 'trauma time', a violent betrayal rendering interpretive and practical resources ineffectual. While developing ethical methods for 'encircling' trauma, Edkins also acknowledges that trauma victims are incapacitated by this fractured moment.¹⁶³ They are in effect suspended between 'the now of the living present, ... and the *anonymous now*, produced by any break in the continuity of change', which, absent interpretation, reduces us from a 'life ... lived as a coherent and consecutive "whole"' to a "'sensate" and incoherent living from day to day in fragments.'¹⁶⁴ Lived time unfolds relative to *something* rather than *everything*. In practical terms, the latter equates with *nothing* – a crippling blank slate admitting no 'which' amongst its innumerable 'whats.'¹⁶⁵ As radical breaks, ruptures are full of – i.e. constituted by – possibility. In related research on identity and social action, this situation presents a serious problem. To be human is to confront perpetually the anxiety and indeterminacy of dynamic environments.¹⁶⁶ However, to find in this condition a self-sufficient validation of radical contingency and the breakdown of 'the very logic of meaningful situations'¹⁶⁷ impoverishes lived experience, which works instead to reduce contingency by taking ownership of a 'domain of envisioned possibilities which, to be meaningful, must be understood to be believed.'¹⁶⁸ Although many critical scholars are 'wary of any "reconstructed" power/knowledge nexus' by which this might occur,¹⁶⁹ this does not vitiate the pragmatic fact that 'reconstruction is essential to the conduct of an intelligent being.'¹⁷⁰ Ruptures and pure events overflow with potential whereas lived time concerns 'possible-being' and 'room for manoeuvre', a sense of how we might become otherwise *from where and when we find ourselves*.¹⁷¹ It depends on some minimal *intelligibility*, some connection – however tenuous – to what we already understand about the world and its

¹⁶³ see Edkins, *Trauma*, 1–13.

¹⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 208; John H. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 229.

¹⁶⁵ see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

¹⁶⁶ Berenskoetter, 'Reclaiming'; Hom, 'Timing Is Everything,' 76–77.

¹⁶⁷ Edkins, 'Novel Writing,' 285.

¹⁶⁸ Berenskoetter, 'Reclaiming,' 661.

¹⁶⁹ Lynch, *Interpreting*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 37.

¹⁷¹ Berenskoetter, 'Reclaiming,' 653.

temporal elements. A rupture might reset our experiential clocks to ‘time zero’ but remaining with trauma and utter indeterminacy offers us no time at all.¹⁷²

Second, although full of possibility, ruptured time often gets defined by its other, by what it is not. Rupture’s appeal rests on its capacity to disrupt *extant* ‘limits’ in IR like the ‘linear time’ of the nation-state.¹⁷³ In part, this has to do with heterotemporality, insofar as rupture opens room for ‘difference’ *per se* in the state’s unity project. But it also depends on a particular interpretive shift that passes without note in critical IR. From the quote above, a rupture ‘does not fit *any* particular system of knowledge’ and exposes ‘the limits of *any* attempt to grasp or “comprehend” the event through, *for example, long-term processes and largescale patterns*.’¹⁷⁴ Similarly, the ‘processes of capture’ that re-inscribe or close down ruptures are ‘the exceptional security measures of the “war on terror”: indefinite detention, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, water-boarding, CIA prison flights, NSA surveillance programs, *and so on*.’¹⁷⁵ These shifts summon out of the interpretive void examples associated primarily with the hegemonic state and mainstream IR. They also obscure the issue of uninhabitability by reifying hegemonic times as baselines against which rupture appears different, dissident, and salutary. Finally, they turn the aforementioned problem of time and its longstanding association with dissolution into a force *naturally* opposed to dominant logics. Put simply, they exchange one temporal presumption for another.

Third, and flowing from this, radical openness is not necessarily better, much less good. ‘Possibility’, ‘openness’, ‘alternatives’, and ‘something that is yet to emerge and yet to be known’¹⁷⁶ all give off a strong whiff of optimism. Pure possibilities and open pathways can break many ways, and ‘[t]here are no guarantees’ that engaging disruptive times ‘will produce the result we desire’ or even one we can accept.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, novel forms of harm and radical evil are also alternatives. Or are we to believe that the Holocaust was unsurpassable? That neoliberal economics, national security, and democratic-peace wars mark the *ne plus ultra* of subordination and ‘violent response’? Are we to forget that disrupting the ‘inertia of [the] status quo’ so as to ‘open space for a new political reconfiguration’ might cash out as President Trump, xenophobia, and the fresh possibility of

¹⁷² See Bousquet, ‘Time Zero,’ 739, and 755 for the related problem ‘that “anything” could happen.’

¹⁷³ Lundborg, ‘Time,’ 263.

¹⁷⁴ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 114–15 *emph. added*.

¹⁷⁵ Lundborg, *Politics*, 108.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁷⁷ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 292.

nuclear war?¹⁷⁸ All of these possibilities inhere in rupture's virtual potential. Yet whether by wilful sublimation or the aforementioned habit of framing ruptures solely against hegemonic counterparts, they remain absent in critical discourse.

Fourth, and relatedly, in practice the discourse of 'pure' rupture is positional and particular. Breaks in the smooth flow of time look very different depending on where you stand, who you are, and what you pursue. For one example, the nation-state backdrop – that benefactor and beneficiary of 'linear time' against which rupture appears salutary – owes its prominence to alternative politics arising after the breakdown of feudal orders and the Reformation. It was, initially, an effort to reduce radical contingency, inhibit subordination and violence, and craft 'something new' in support of religious and other differences during a time of rupture.¹⁷⁹ That it did so by papering over numerous other disjunctures qualifies rather than vitiates this historical dynamic.

For another example, consider the rupture-based reading of 9/11:

Before the movements of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon became "9/11", before they received their name and date, and before they were placed in a larger historical context and narrative structure, they were singular events, ... [which] eluded frameworks of representation and highlighted something wholly other and incomprehensible, which disrupted the "modern" present and the sovereign voice of reason ...¹⁸⁰

This reading of 9/11 as rupture only makes sense from the particular viewpoint of Anglo-American hegemony. It would be unrecognizable to the al Qaeda hijackers, Osama bin Laden, and those who supported the substantial preparations required to *produce* these 'singular events.' For them, these 'movements' were more like 'a culmination of history'¹⁸¹ or a closure of sorts located – and indeed conceived of – 'in a larger historical context and narrative structure' or representative framework drawn from a peculiar political theology.

¹⁷⁸ See Mary H.K. Choi, 'A Marxist for Trump: Far-Left Philosopher Slavoj Žižek Explains Why He Supported Trump over Clinton,' VICE News, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://news.vice.com/story/far-left-philosopher-slavoj-zizek-explains-why-he-supported-trump-over-clinton>.

¹⁷⁹ See Michael C. Williams, *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007), chp. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Lundborg, 'Limits,' 115; Lundborg, *Politics*, 45–61.

¹⁸¹ Bousquet, 'Time Zero,' 739.

That is, one group's rupture is another's 'fullness of time.'

The rapture of rupture

Uninhabitable, defined by its other, conflating novel with better, and unavoidably positional – in spite of these tensions rupture enjoys a prominent place in the critical discourse of time. How, then, does it actually work in that discourse? What explains its theoretical punch? I think the answer is a deeply embedded liberal-idealism. To be clear, this is not the neoliberalism of late modernity or the Kantian triad of democracy, interdependence, and multilateralism.¹⁸² Rather, rupture recalls the classic liberal commitment to the value and rights of the individual and the consequent responsibilities of sovereign states.¹⁸³ Nor is it idealist in an ideational or strictly philosophical sense. Rather, I refer to a tendency to abstract ethical aspirations into theoretical assumptions while ignoring the concrete realities of political power, indeterminacy, and unintended consequences.¹⁸⁴ Without substantive content, these notions appear relevant to most situations but offer little practical traction because all the heavy lifting is done by assumptions, abstractions, or productive silences. In the case of critical IR, we might think of this liberal-idealism as *the rapture of rupture*.

First, the liberalism embedded in rupture. Critical scholars declare a commitment only to the 'politics ... [of] an active process of *drawing and experimenting with lines, without having any preestablished lines—of history, society, and the world—to fall back on.*'¹⁸⁵ This springs from their fear of 'reinforcing practices of security and violent forms of response.'¹⁸⁶ But why should we eschew security practices and violence – two august aspects of politics – unless we build on *some* preestablished lines authorizing the importance of human individuals and viewing the state as a threat rather than a security provider and/or realization of collective will? Other critical scholars draw these lines from the 'politically affirmative and progressive nature of deconstructive thought, as revealed through its onto-political character,'¹⁸⁷ which acknowledges a commitment to choosing a *which* among many possible

¹⁸² Jennifer Sterling-Folker, 'All Hail to the Chief: Liberal IR Theory in the New World Order,' *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 1 (2015): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/insp.12089>.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Andrew R. Hom, 'Truth and Power, Uncertainty and Catastrophe: Ethics in IR Realism,' in *Routledge Handbook on Ethics in International Relations*, ed. Brent J. Steele and Eric A. Heinze (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), forthcoming.

¹⁸⁵ Lundborg, *Politics*, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ David Campbell, 'Beyond Choice: The Onto-Politics of Critique,' *International Relations* 19, no. 1 (2005): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117805050068>.

whats. This sort of progressivism wordlessly underwrites claims that in ruptures wake, ‘the only guiding principle is that of multiplicity itself’, which prioritizes ‘difference’ and ‘singularity’ but presumably not different violence or singular evil.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, it gives proposals to experiment with ‘more productive and creative’ approaches the gloss of self-sufficiency by orienting us toward welcome possibilities rather than novel forms of depredation. In these ways, times of rupture depend on classically liberal sensibilities, where the intrinsic value of human individuals makes it important to speak for the powerless, the marginalized, the non-elite and the ‘professionals of nothing.’¹⁸⁹ This is entirely consistent with the earlier point that every temporality reflects particular purposes and works according to specific standards of reference. Critical scholars acknowledge this partway, noting that experimentation ‘can be said to express a particular *ethics* of the event, an ethics of trying to encounter the ambiguities and uncertainties of the pure event in a more productive and creative way.’¹⁹⁰ Yet *as* an ethics, this involves some aspect of reconstruction, just as any critique implies or begs a substantive vision of an alternate future.¹⁹¹

However, such liberal and ethical impulses create tensions in times of rupture. As one liberal theorist notes, liberalism makes little sense ‘as an arena for the unfettered expression of “difference”’; its distinctiveness ‘lies not in the absence but, rather, in the content of its public purposes’ and how they privilege individuals and diversity.¹⁹² This is not multiplicity and possibility *as such* but rather from ‘a view of the human good that favours certain ways of life and tilts against others.’¹⁹³ Without that ‘tilt’, experimenting with times of rupture becomes ‘a circular exercise, repeated for itself but with no effect, no life force, and no bite beyond the choir to whom it preaches.’¹⁹⁴ Or worse, it opens room for novel forms of harm.

This is where idealism becomes crucial to ruptured times. As various champions insist, rupture concerns *only* an engagement with possibility, thinking about what another politics might require to open up genuine alternatives. Even though other political agents are busy

¹⁸⁸ Lundborg, *Politics*, 92; see also Shapiro, ‘National Times,’ 82.

¹⁸⁹ Ken Booth, ‘Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist,’ in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (London: UCL Press, 1997), 114.

¹⁹⁰ Lundborg, *Politics*, 88.

¹⁹¹ Berenskoetter, ‘Reclaiming,’ 660.

¹⁹² William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3–4.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹⁴ Sterling-Folker, ‘All Hail,’ 41.

‘recompos[ing] and reassert[ing]’ interpretive frameworks in rupture’s wake,¹⁹⁵ critical advocates are unwilling to ‘subordinate the mysteries of time to specific notions of historical change.’¹⁹⁶ Like other engagements with, say, protest cultures, there is a palpable ‘optimism for change’ here; one ‘rooted squarely in [the] refusal to describe what form a newly imagined politics might take’ and thus ‘defined only by its unconventionality.’¹⁹⁷ Novelty and possibility as such only resonate as preferable if we assume they encourage *spontaneous* improvement by virtue of their ‘extra-discursive’ or ‘natural state, a kind of protean fecundity that exists in idealized form in isolation from politics as it is usually lived.’¹⁹⁸ Moreover, this frames violence and subordination as intrinsically old and positive pluralism as resolutely new. Ironically, then, given critical scholars’ resistance to imagined ‘temporal borders’ and avowed interest in ‘a radical critique of the contingent “ground(ing)”’ of modernity,¹⁹⁹ the value of rupture depends upon a thoroughly modern form of temporal delineation.

These silent assumptions and hidden logics help ‘characterize’ and thus ‘control’ times of rupture,²⁰⁰ transforming it from a description of traumatic and unlivable conditions to the foundation of a novel ethics that insists we ‘remain with uncertainty’ and ‘hope that something different’ will emerge.²⁰¹ They are what take us from difference itself to a future ‘deemed worthy of being aspired towards.’²⁰² They thus obscure the need to make alternatives tangible, which is vital for critique’s sake and for the everyday politics of individuals who do not enjoy the privilege of remaining in sheer contingency and indeterminacy.²⁰³ And they inhibit any evaluation of ruptured time as a ‘*practical* question’ of what it actually ‘does’, its ‘effects’, and how it works.²⁰⁴

To drive this point home, recall an earlier vision of novelty and difference tinged by tragedy. Hannah Arendt embraced ‘natality’ as moments of pure possibility but insisted these be tempered by a political sensitivity to potentially catastrophic unintended consequences. Each

¹⁹⁵ Bousquet, ‘Time Zero,’ 757.

¹⁹⁶ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 117.

¹⁹⁷ Tim Markham, ‘Social Media, Protest Cultures and Political Subjectivities of the Arab Spring,’ *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 1 (2014): 97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713511893>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 100, 115; also Walker, *After the Globe*.

²⁰⁰ Berenskoetter, ‘Approaches,’ 154.

²⁰¹ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 286; Lundborg, *Politics*, 115.

²⁰² Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 100.

²⁰³ As E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21, 87 argues, ‘ethics must be interpreted in terms of politics’ – it entails the relentless critique of concrete proposals.

²⁰⁴ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 286.

birth, in her formulation, is ‘uniquely new’ but includes no guarantees – ‘authentic’ novelty might be ‘all-destructive.’²⁰⁵ Ignoring these implications depoliticizes and gentrifies novelty and leaves us poorly prepared to resist depredation when it (re-) emerges.²⁰⁶ Only by ignoring or sublimating the heavy lifting can critical scholars pass over a ‘rainbow bridge’²⁰⁷ of sorts that turns the start of the political problem – radical change – into the self-sufficient conclusion of ‘another politics’, which occludes the need to reduce contingency while avoiding catastrophe. So while deeply suspicious of promises to ‘take us from here to there’ or move us from past through present toward a better future,²⁰⁸ the critical discourse of rupture works – like the rapture itself – on the assumption ‘of being carried onward or swept along’ by ‘forces of movement’ that emerge independent of conscious effort.²⁰⁹ The rapture of rupture thus marks a missed opportunity, beginning with a legitimately ‘different perspective on time and politics’²¹⁰ but producing a concept with ‘little relevance to life’²¹¹ because it demurs at precisely the point when it becomes necessary to lean on the scales, to encourage *this* time (or these times) instead of *that* and thereby privilege some purposes and politics over others. Ruptures are golden opportunities to develop another, better politics – as such they require more than hope, nebulous experimentation,²¹² or the refusal to say any more than ‘what I think it does for me.’²¹³ Unless we think novel harms impossible and better outcomes naturally assured, ruptures mark a moment when it is vital to wilfully construct or at least delimit political time anew.²¹⁴

²⁰⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 178–79, 216; see also Berenskoetter, ‘Reclaiming,’ 661.

²⁰⁶ Put differently, this ‘abandon[s] the sublime to those’ who would ‘instrumentalize it’; Bousquet, ‘Time Zero,’ 764.

²⁰⁷ Arendt, *Life*, 149–57.

²⁰⁸ Lundborg, *Politics*, 3–4.

²⁰⁹ See ‘Rapture, N.,’ *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158234>.

²¹⁰ Lundborg, ‘Limits,’ 117.

²¹¹ Arendt, *Life*, 149–57.

²¹² Lundborg, *Politics*, 100.

²¹³ Edkins, ‘Novel Writing,’ 292.

²¹⁴ For my purposes it is all the more telling that when developing a more robust account of time and international ethics, as Lundborg has just done through a Derridean reading of neorealism, the central thrust shifts from the primacy of remaining with uncertainty for the sake of ‘another politics’ to a reconceptualization of ethics as an ‘unconditional affirmation of the incalculable future that structures international life and inevitably exposes it to the worst forms of destruction’; Tom Lundborg, ‘The ethics of neorealism: Waltz and the time of international life,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, Online First (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066118760990>. This argument remains committed to an open view of time and opposed to ‘static’ principles; Lundborg, ‘Ethics,’ 9. Yet by collapsing the vast normative distance between ‘pure’ or universal ideals, on the one hand, and widespread immiseration and global extinction events, on the other, it effects a decisive closure of ethical deliberation and political analysis in a ‘temporal horizon of neorealism’ that entails we *affirm unconditionally* the full range of political possibilities rather than trying to construct a flexible politics that still limits the very worst of these Lundborg, ‘Ethics,’ 7-10, 14-16; for a very different reading of neorealist time, see Hom and Steele, ‘Open Horizons,’ 275-76. Deconstructive-defensive

Conclusion

This paper tracked four discursive habits – routinized denunciations of ‘timelessness’ and ‘linear time’ complemented by ritual incantations of ‘heterotemporality’ and ‘rupture’ – that constitute the temporal turn in critical IR. Each depended upon shared but silent assumptions to make sense; for various reasons each de-cohered under closer inspection. Underspecified references to timelessness and linear time totalize, reify, and inhibit understanding of the complex relationships between different times and different hegemonic logics and practices. Alternative times remain fuzzy and isolated from each other. And claims about ‘possibility’, ‘creativity’, and ‘novelty’ in the discourse of rupture depend upon an idealised, even rapturous assumption that indeterminacy and contingency will spontaneously produce another (i.e. better) politics.

Taken together these temporal habits constitute a set of identity commitments: we critical scholars reject timeless theories and the linear time of the state, whatever those might actually be; we embrace time pluralism and rupture, whatever those might actually mean. This does not negate the incisive works discussed above. Rather, it demonstrates how much easier it is to apprehend the times of politics than to comprehend them. In this sense, we are all Augustinians. The problems arise when lack of reflexivity about this situation reinforces silent *doxas*, which in turn reduce temporal analysis to loose theorizing and rhetorical provocation and inhibit our ability to put time in dialogue with a wider range of interlocutors and political phenomena.

For example, recent work in historical institutionalism develops explicitly temporal propositions about institutions. These include sequencing, path dependence, critical junctures, legacy and lock-in effects, creative action, and the influence of founding moments on institutional identities, which inhibit radical change in ways that renders institutions both ‘inefficient’ and able to ‘outlive their original rationale.’²¹⁵ This cursory glance highlights opportunities for dialogue with the critical works discussed above. Do sequences, path

realism thus achieves something of which Waltz could only have dreamed: a truly *value-free ethics* in which ‘desirable’ outcomes can only ever be (must always include) ‘whatever happens’; Lundborg, ‘Ethics’, 16. While this relaxes some of the tensions of rapturous times, it represents if anything a more totalizing demurral that does nothing to address issues of positionality and inhabitability.

²¹⁵ See, inter alia, Pierson, *Politics in Time*; Fioretos, ‘Historical Institutionalism’; Orfeo Fioretos, ed., *International Politics and Institutions in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Tine Hanrieder, *International Organization in Time: Fragmentation and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

dependencies, and legacy effects recapitulate sovereign unilinear time or complicate it by identifying multiple temporalities in competition with each other in the international system? Do feedback loops require a background linear time or – as they become stickier – do they mark cyclical and even ‘timeless’ phenomena? How do institutions turn ruptures into critical junctures? Do junctures and founding moments preserve some trace of their originating rupture that affords creative opportunities to contest institutional power? What does the tendency of institutions to outlive their animating purpose tell us about the broader workings of temporal power in international politics? Are institutions more heterotemporal than historical institutionalists realize? Despite these points of contact, historical institutionalists and critical IR’s time scholars are not yet speaking to each other. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how they would without a concerted effort to more fully explicate and differentiate the times of powerful international actors, something that critical habits impede.²¹⁶

Likewise, for many years foreign policy analysis (FPA) scholars have considered factors with clear temporal dynamics. These include crisis situations, cognitive and group processes under time pressure, decision stages and ‘occasions for decision’, and historical analogies.²¹⁷ Once again, even this briefest of surveys indicates promising avenues between FPA and critical time studies. Hutchings’ analytical framework bears directly on decision making contexts insofar as *chronos* describes the homogeneous, orderly and seemingly objective flow of time and *kairos* refers to qualitatively unique moments of opportunity when decisive action can steer or transform the arc of history.²¹⁸ Theories of the event concern how we interpret and inscribe the flux of immediate experience within a conceptual apparatus that allows us to apprehend *what* is happening *now*. This points to FPA interests in stages, sequences, and the very perception of crises as such.²¹⁹ Moreover, what are crises if not ruptures in the fabric of ordinary policy processes? More generally, critical IR’s emphasis on the variable, intersubjective nature of political time resounds with psychological approaches to FPA.

²¹⁶ This is not to place the entire onus on critical IR. Historical institutionalists could reflect on their habits of treating time as a pre-formed dimension or a causal force that inhibits rationality – both assumptions embedded in their conceptual idiom of change ‘over’ or ‘through’ time, inefficiencies, pathologies, and the like; see Hom, ‘Reckoning Ruin,’ chapter 4.

²¹⁷ See, *inter alia*, Beasley Ryan K. et al., ‘People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking: Insights from Comparative Case Studies,’ *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (May 30, 2003): 217–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00238>; Valerie M. Hudson, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations,’ *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2005.00001.x>; Binnur Ozkececi-Taner, ‘Reviewing the Literature on Sequential/Dynamic Foreign Policy Decision Making,’ *International Studies Review* 8, no. 3 (2006): 545–54.

²¹⁸ Hutchings, *Time*.

²¹⁹ Lundborg, *Politics*; McIntosh, ‘Theory,’ 472–73, 479–80.

Despite these opportunities, critical IR and FPA scholars have not engaged much and certainly not across their shared concern with time.²²⁰ Doing so would once again require an effort to meet in the middle, but perhaps even more than historical institutionalism, there are promising time paths between these two literatures that could productively mobilize their shared challenge to rational actor assumptions and purely static and structural accounts of international politics.²²¹

If the temporal turn is indeed worth taking, and I believe it is, then we should make the most of its potential. Temporal phenomena lurk in nearly every corner of global politics and a variety of IR scholars are taking notice. Critical IR can offer them an invaluable collection of perspectives on the diversity, fluidity, and possibilities housed in time. But it is precisely these assets that recommend a more sensitive treatment of language, clearer links between various concepts of time, and a more forthright discussion of their politics. One key lesson of critical IR's temporal turn is that time bears on numerous researches. It can be a synthetic resource. Yet to date the critical discourse of time tends toward insularity and isolation rather than openness and integration. Becoming more reflexive about its tensions and contradictions can help grant time the place it deserves in IR while positioning critical perspectives at the heart of these developments. So while my arguments might seem like strictures that hobble critical research, they are not calls to put on the brakes. Instead, they are a way to *downshift*, to avoid centrifugal pull while harnessing centripetal power. That, after all, is how a turn generates maximum momentum.

²²⁰ This likely has to do with the more elite-focused nature of FPA versus critical interests in foregrounding marginalized subjects.

²²¹ For an initial effort at this, see Ryan K. Beasley and Andrew R. Hom, 'Foreign Policy in the Fourth Dimension (FP4D): Locating Time in Decision Making Processes,' in *International Studies Association Annual Convention* (San Francisco, 2018).